NGA joins GitHub, offers code to help disaster response

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SPRINGFIELD, Va. - The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency this week joined GitHub, a popular social network that allows programmers to collaborate and share computer code between users. The network allows developers to modify, distribute and perform work on the code – either to improve NGA's product, or for their own use.

Participating on GitHub will make it possible for other organizations to benefit from the agency's development efforts. NGA hopes to reap benefits in innovation, creativity, and the power of a far-reaching community of programmers who approach the development of the program from different perspectives.

"It's critical we identify more ways to be innovative, reduce costs and integrate efforts across the intelligence community and all of government," said NGA Director Letitia Long. "It's a new way of thinking for us, and it is exactly the kind of thing we need to be doing."

Ben Balter, the "government evangelist" at GitHub, tweeted about NGA's presence on the platform.

"@BenBalter: Awesome to see @NGA_GEOINT pushing code publicly to @github. If they can do open source, any agency can. github.com/ngageoint."

NGA began by sharing its code for GeoQ, a tool the agency developed to assist with Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Recovery (HADR) efforts. The tool was further refined in partnership with FEMA and has since begun to be used as the backbone of a shared disaster response solution across the U.S. government and first-responder community.

GeoQ provides workflow management and integrates imagery and analysis from multiple sources, such as photos from smart phones and news broadcast footage, to help identify disaster areas and extent of damage, said Ray Bauer, technology lead for NGA's Readiness, Response and Recovery team. It enables analysts to review imagery from different sources simultaneously, rather than sequentially, which results in much faster damage assessments and better prioritization of limited first-responder resources in a time-sensitive environment.

"We built GeoQ on all open-source frameworks to make it easily shareable with our mission and response partners. This allows them to integrate the software into their own visual display systems," said Bauer. "What we're hoping for now is to spark interaction with the GitHub communities to improve the code. As long as you have access to the Internet, you can be a part of the solution."

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GeoHuntsville, an economic initiative comprised of more than 50 private companies, 25 government entities and three universities engaged in geospatial technology applications in the Huntsville and North Alabama area, is testing out the GeoQ code on a beta site running on Amazon Cloud. GeoHuntsville will demonstrate this code development partnership at the upcoming GEOINT Symposium in Tampa April 14-16, at booth 6098 in the Tampa Convention Center's exhibit hall.

"We appreciate the support of the NGA," said City of Huntsville, Ala. Mayor Tommy Battle. "Our initiative seeks to demonstrate how we can implement location-based technology and effectively distribute information to first responders and others quickly in the event of local emergencies."

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About NGA…

The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency delivers world-class geospatial intelligence, or GEOINT, that provides a decisive advantage to warfighters, policymakers, intelligence professionals and first responders. Both an intelligence agency and combat support agency, NGA fulfills the president's national security priorities in partnership with the intelligence community and the Department of Defense.

NGA also is the lead federal agency for GEOINT and manages a global consortium of more than 400 commercial and government relationships. NGA is headquartered in Springfield, Va., and has two major locations in St. Louis and Arnold, Mo. Hundreds of NGA employees serve on support teams at U.S. military, diplomatic and allied locations around the world.

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